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Viewing cable 06DAMASCUS4877, SYRIA'S DAMASCUS DECLARATION GROUP PLANS TO GO MORE PUBLIC

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 06DAMASCUS4877 | 2006-10-11 16:12 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL | Embassy Damascus |

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SUBJECT: SYRIA'S DAMASCUS DECLARATION GROUP PLANS TO GO MORE PUBLIC

REF: A. DAMASCUS 4482

[¶](#)B. DAMASCUS 4797

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) Summary: Damascus Declaration leader XXXXXXXXXXXX said in an October 3 meeting with A/DCM that the Damascus Declaration group turns a year old this month and plans to expand its activities from internal group organizing to public outreach. The group is still waiting for a response about expanded Kurdish participation, and it is planning to discuss an offer for a possible coalition with the exiled National Salvation Front, XXXXXXXXXXXX said. EU re-engagement efforts could represent a positive development, if, as the Germans are proposing, each step in the re-engagement process is conditioned to a SARG response, such as expanded rights to free speech and the release of political prisoners. XXXXXXXXXXXX expressed a belief voiced by other Syrian government critics that the UNIIIC investigation represents the best chance for change in the Syrian regime, and expressed wishful thinking about the possibility of an internal coup if the next report provides evidence of SARG complicity in the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri. XXXXXXXXXXXX's comments are optimistic, particularly about the group's public profile in Syria, but to his credit, he is still functioning after a year. End Summary.

¶2. (C) DAMASCUS DECLARATION TO START OUTREACH: A/DCM and Poloff met October 3 with Damascus Declaration (DD) leader XXXXXXXXXXXX, who said the DD will celebrate its first anniversary on October 16 and will turn more of its attention from self-organizational activities to public outreach. All 22 members of the group's executive committee met secretly for a day in late September in Aleppo, where they agreed on next steps, XXXXXXXXXXXX said. Up until now, the group has established a weak but decentralized network in Syrian cities such as Aleppo, Homs and Hama, which could be mobilized and expanded, he said. Starting this month, the group plans to publicize its activities via its yet-to-be unveiled website

and through regional media.

13. (C) COURTING MORE KURDS, DISCUSSING THE MB: The DD group is still waiting to hear whether the Kurdish Future Movement and Azadi and Yekiti parties will join the organization (reftel A), XXXXXXXXXXXX said. Such an alliance would require the DD group to include in its manifesto a sentence about "the need to find a democratic solution for the Kurdish problem within the Syrian state," XXXXXXXXXXXX said. (Comment: XXXXXXXXXXXX would clearly like to have the Future Movement and Yekiti and Azadi parties join the DD, as demonstrated by XXXXXXXXXXXX's participation in an October 5 protest jointly organized by the three groups, reported in reftel B.) Separately, the DD executive committee members still needed to discuss a September 25 letter from Syria Muslim Brotherhood leader Ali Bayanouni, in the name of the National Salvation Front, offering to start a coalition, XXXXXXXXXXXX said. "I don't think we'll agree, but we probably won't saying anything against the NSF publicly either," said XXXXXXXXXXXX, noting general opposition to Islamist participation by the current Kurdish members and DD spokesman Hassan Abdulazeem, who also heads the Socialist Union Party.

14. (C) TO ENGAGE OR NOT TO ENGAGE: XXXXXXXXXXXX responded to a question about EU re-engagement efforts by saying, "If engagement means that the regime will stay, this is the worst option." He said that he would, however, support a re-engagement process envisioned by Germany in which each step was linked to a precise condition, such as expanding free speech or releasing political prisoners. XXXXXXXXXXXX, who meets regularly with German officials, said that he has not had contact with Italians, Greeks or Spaniards here but noted that their lenient approach was "spoiling the regime."

15. (C) VALUE OF PUBLIC USG STATEMENT: XXXXXXXXXXXX recommended against a USG statement on the situation in Syria, stating that "American credibility in the region is at ground zero." If the U.S. Administration said that it supports democracy in the region, people here will react by opposing the idea of democracy, said XXXXXXXXXXXX, citing a widespread belief here that the U.S. made fatal mistakes in Iraq and has failed to take needed action on a comprehensive Middle East settlement that would grant Palestinians just resolution of their claims. (Note: In previous conversations, he has also emphasized the need to resolve the issue of the occupied Golan Heights.)

DAMASCUS 00004877 002 OF 002

16. (C) UNIIIC investigation: XXXXXXXXXXXX expressed a belief voiced by other Syrian government critics that the UNIIIC investigation represents the best possible hope for change in the Syrian regime. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is seriously worried about the investigation, as seen by ongoing regime efforts, primarily through meddling in Lebanon, to prevent the establishment of an international tribunal, XXXXXXXXXXXX said. If the next UNIIIC report points to more evidence of high-level SARG complicity in the assassination of the former Lebanese PM, elements in the Syrian military might launch a coup, paving the way for a transitional government, XXXXXXXXXXXX speculated.

17. (C) Comment: XXXXXXXXXXXX seemed overly optimistic, both about the DD group's ability to reach out to the Syria public, which is largely unaware of the organization, as well as about the prospects of a military coup, post-Brammertz report. So far, the reality on the ground gives no sign that the regime is loosening its grip on unsanctioned activities here or growing any weaker. Despite his optimism, XXXXXXXXXXXX and his opposition group have succeeded at meeting and organizing for a full year, which is in and of itself a rare accomplishment in Syria.

CORBIN